



Podcast Transcript: Language Immersion Community Engagement and Development Strategy

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Olani Lilly: Welcome, everyone, to the first podcast of the Native American Language Resource Center Summer Series on How to Create an Immersion School. I'm Olani Lilly, and today I'm here with Andrea Dias-Machado, who will share her expertise in community engagement and development strategy. Welcome, Andrea. We're so glad that you could be with us today.

Andrea Dias-Machado: Aloha. My name is Andrea Diaz Machado, and I am a makua, a parent of a student who attended Kekulakaiopuni Immersion School. The school is located in Pearl City on the island of O'ahu.

Olani Lilly: Thank you for that great introduction. There's been a lot of interest within Native communities across the nation about how to figure out the best process and steps for creating immersion programs. We wanted to talk with you because you have been focused on the critical groundwork necessary to determine the need for a language immersion school.

Andrea Dias-Machado: Yeah, my work is from the parent perspective and trying to figure out how to create solutions for our son, his classmates, and generations of students that will come after him to have access to Hawaiian language immersion within their community.

Olani Lilly: That is so awesome. So why is that important and why is Hawaiian language medium education important in your community?

Andrea Dias-Machado: Let me provide some cultural context. A mano or shark guardian named Ka'ahu Pahau, provided protection in the large estuary and fish ponds of Pu'u'loa, also known as Pearl Harbor. So this describes her protection against any kind of wrong or harm that would be done to her people. Likewise, it is our role as parents to protect our children's right to Hawaiian immersion education. This broader context also makes me think of all the people who came before us who fought for Hawaiian immersion. So I just want to take a moment to really honor all their hard work that we continue to burn that fire, knowing that so many came before. Why it's really important is because the Hawaiian



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language is paramount to understanding our culture. It's the lens that we see the world through as Kanaka Hawai'i. Without Hawaiian language, we are a lost people, in my opinion.

Olani Lilly: That's a really good point. And I just wanted to make a little like geographical context, right? So Pu'u Loa, which you refer to as Pearl Harbor, is it near Wai'au or the community in which you want to develop this immersion school?

Andrea Dias-Machado: Yes, so Pu'u Loa is the waterways that is like, yeah, connected to Wai'au. So very near, it was the breadbasket of that area and is actually the estuary of the entire moku of Ewa, which is the land district that Wai'au is within.

Olani Lilly: Oh, awesome. Thank you again for that geographical context because lots of people are familiar with Pearl Harbor, but not everybody's familiar with the connection to the school and the community in which you want to embed your school in. So, thank you for that. You mentioned previously how your perspective is shaped by your role as a parent. Why did you want to start a middle school immersion program rather than send your son to another immersion school?

Andrea Dias-Machado: That's a good point. So, there are schools, but they're very far from where we live. So, we started to advocate. I'm a part of a group of parents called the Ea Education, Ewa Moku Hui Makua. Ea in Hawaiian means sovereignty, independence. We paired Ea with education because education and control of our education will lead to independence of our people. So, it means that we as Kanaka, as Hawaiians, have access and choice to educating our children through our language, our stories, and our practices. We are a part of the movement to decolonize education.

Olani Lilly: That's amazing. Particularly like on O'ahu, where there seems to be such a large population and seems very urban, it may appear to outsiders that resources are available. But I guess like you're saying, the resources are far away from your home and there is cultural value in place-based learning. Now that we have some context for the work that you're trying to do, let's talk about the planning and processes that you were a part of. To start that conversation, I'm interested to know what you think are the key factors of readiness that should be addressed in a planning process for a new immersion program?

Andrea Dias-Machado: I'd say one important aspect is engaging with like-minded parents and community members. Can you mobilize people to move the movement forward? Are there parents or community stakeholders that are willing to commit to being a part of solving a problem and are willing to commit their time, their resources, and their energy to



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implement a plan and move it forward? I'd say that is step one. Step two is being able to demonstrate need and demand. For us, that need was identified as a secondary school. Whatever the need is, you want to be able to show that and collect data on needs and demands. Within Hawaiian culture, as within many Indigenous cultures, stories are how we capture our history and share our lived experiences.

Olani Lilly: Yeah, that's fabulous. You know, you talked about data and sort of creating this story. Was there any information that you had to seek out that was being held maybe within government agencies, and how did you engage them?

Andrea Dias-Machado: Through the process of mobilizing, we did focus groups. We also created needs assessment reports, and once we had that information, we contacted the Office of Hawaiian Education within the Hawai'i Department of Education. Because we had done this outreach work, we were able to create a clear and compelling case about the need and demands for a secondary school. A lot of the work was done already at that point, and what we needed from them was to help us navigate within that larger system to understand and figure out who do we talk to next and where do we go next in the process. That community piece is essential and then bridging the communities with existing structures and resources.

Olani Lilly: Wow. It sounds like there was a lot of work being done towards getting the school going. Could you share an update about where you are now in that process?

Andrea Dias-Machado: So, where we're at right now is that the school will open this upcoming school year, so fall 2023. Yay! The name of the school is Pulakaiopuni o Kapolei, and it will open to the inaugural class of Papa'i Hiku 7th graders. It will be located on the campus of Kapolei Middle School, but the program will come from Anoe Noe Hawaiian Language Immersion School, which is a longstanding K-12 hula kayapuni that's located in Palolo Valley on the island of O'ahu.

Olani Lilly: Wow, that's awesome.

Andrea Dias-Machado: So, as initiators and founders, you know, we wanted to be involved in decisions regarding the type of education students will receive at the new school. We would like to work in partnership with the school administration before the school year, which happens to be within a matter of weeks. But yeah, to be able to sit down and figure out how can we co-create and what does that look like? We are not just parents of students in isolation, we all have professions. We're business owners, we're many, many different



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things. And so being able to work with the Department of Education to lean into our strengths gives a place for all of us at the table.

Olani Lilly: Yeah, really interesting. I mean, it sounds like you folks have been doing a lot of work, having a lot of conversations with all different types of people, both within and outside of your school community. What kind of time is dedicated to this type of work and how do you manage all that? It sounds like a lot.

Andrea Dias-Machado: Yes, it's definitely been a lot of work. And I would say it's been the focus of my life for the last two years, you know, and we basically had to create the roadmap ourselves. You know, with all the efforts happening in the Hawaiian language community, there still isn't a roadmap that people can use across communities that want to stand up a new Hawaiian immersion school. So, we really feel it is important to have a how-to, and that's why I really appreciate this summer immersion series that the Office of Education is conducting because it brings this conversation to a much larger audience. What has been helpful is the ability to stay fluid, you know, always having a plan on paper, as well as in my mind, you know, listening to community, learning from community, hearing their concerns, hearing their questions. And what has been a true highlight of this work is hearing the celebrations when people know, when parents know that their keiki have a next step.

Olani Lilly: I bet. And what a key life skill set to balance having a plan but staying fluid. You know, you've mentioned community and working as a group to accomplish this work. Tell me more about the idea of using each other's strengths and deciding who was going to do what from your makua group.

Andrea Dias-Machado: Yeah, so you know it really did just kind of start through asking the question which was you know where are you sending your keiki, where are you sending your child after sixth grade at Wai'au? And so through those natural conversations, you know, it led to sparking ideas. There are six of us on our Hui Makua. We've never worked together. Some of us really just met as part of this group and so really trying to figure out learning about each other at the same time of really creating a movement and taking this work to a much larger level. I'm just very grateful to all of them for just, you know, for digging in and taking that risk.

Olani Lilly: Yeah. And I think your school is just continuing the tradition for Hawaiian immersion as far as like starting from the parents and really being grounded in the needs and the parents being connected and being founders of, you know, of immersion schools



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across the state throughout the last, what is it, 36, 36 years of Hawaiian immersion education in Hawaii. So that's really nice.

Andrea Dias-Machado: Mahalo. We also spread a wide net to have conversations with people from the teacher unions, founders of the charter schools, community partners to build our network. Really, we wanted to really learn from as many people as we could, and to share our story with as many people that would listen. And, you know, where we're at in terms of building partnerships is that we have partnerships that are evidenced through at least a verbal commitment of what we are doing with our school.

Olani Lilly: Nice. That's awesome.

Andrea Dias-Machado: And then I think for me, I really leaned into the skills that I have built in my career. So, you know, being able to facilitate groups, conducting data collection and data analysis, and then being able to share back that data in a way that influences change within larger systems is what I focused on. And I do believe that that was an important skill to have, especially when we began to engage and connect with the Department of Education is really to have that clear and compelling story. And with the rest of our team, it was about identifying our strengths. And as you know, in our culture, people are very humble. They don't like to talk about themselves. They feel like they're bragging. So this was really a way for all of us to really be who we are and to share the gifts that we come with and contribute in a way that felt right for us. And you know it's like making a lei. In our culture we love to make lei and we braided those sweet spots together into a lei that was a collection of all of our skill sets.

Olani Lilly: That's a great visualization I think of the team. You're right, lots of people don't like to brag about what skillsets they bring, but they'll sort of naturally fall into the areas in which they feel comfortable, at least. So, looking back at the work you and your group engaged in, what resources would you recommend to another community to acquire in order to be successful with starting this process?

Andrea Dias-Machado: I think my top recommendation would be that there would be a staff person or a team that's positioned to provide those kinds of what we term backbone support, facilitative skills, those administrative skills, so that the community members and parents can really be in the position of the thinking and the creating, so that they can really focus on that and have those pieces be kind of taken care of by that government entity or that team that is really focused on this as their core service that they provide to groups that want to do the same things that we've done and that other community groups have done.



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Olani Lilly: Yeah. Yeah, so I wanted to sort of dig in, kind of jumping off of that, dig into some of the unique considerations in this work with being a Native language immersion program and starting new. I mean, there's lots of information about how to start a charter school, how to start a private school, how to start a public school. There's a lot of information, but I'm also thinking that there might be some unique considerations when you're thinking about an educational program that, like what you shared, is not just a language immersion but also place-based and culture-based. And so, could you share with us some of those unique considerations?

Andrea Dias-Machado: Yes, I think one of the big barriers that we face is teacher shortage. And, you know, we are cognizant that teacher shortage is an issue across the nation. However, when you look at a language teacher, that shortage, that gap is much more severe. When there are Hawaiian language immersion teachers, they need to be both proficient in the Hawaiian language as well as within a content area. You know, some of the ideas or even the opportunities that are available could be, there are university teaching training programs here in Hawaii. So, kind of really looking at the needs and where immersion schools are being built and being able to train teachers that come from these communities in developing place-based curriculum. So, I see an to create a real strategic pathway that is about growing your own kumu within specific communities that really starts at the university level and getting those kumu ready and being able to kind of plug them into the communities that they're from. You know, ideally, we hope that our teachers can come from the communities that they're from for a variety of reasons, because they're connected, they're rooted, these are their people, quote-unquote. So, if there was a way to kind of do that and to work with the communities where the schools are, you know, what are the needs of schools and kind of strategically plan to meet the needs and demands that we have. The other thing is to look at existing teachers within our public schools and to provide them opportunities to learn the Hawaiian language. You know, being that they're already proficient in the content area, to have them learn Ola Loha Wai'i, I believe we can fill a gap. And there are some proof points in the community that speak to that being an effective strategy on how to fill that gap. So that could be another opportunity that we could leverage in filling the Hawaiian language teacher shortage that we face in Hawai'i.

Olani Lilly: That's a great idea. Again, taking teachers who are already strong in content, maybe have years of experience, but would like to learn the language and get into an immersion school. That's a great idea. And it probably is probably cost-effective too, right? I mean, and maybe, you know, there can be incentives around whether it's through like talking with HSTA, the teacher union, around some opportunities or working, you know, around like housing for teachers that is affordable, you know, there's lots of opportunities

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to pair that and encourage teachers to develop the Hawaiian language. So, I mean, that's great. I mean, you've had such an amazing experience in getting, you know, your immersion school going and with all the considerations that come with that. What advice would you give another group or community wanting to start an immersion school?

Andrea Dias-Machado: The advice I would give is to really start from what you know as community members. I think oftentimes we look to some outside source to give us information, but the community knows best their resources, their needs, their strengths, the people in their community that have access to different kinds of things. So really, really trusting and looking from within. We really looked at our own skills. We looked at our personal and our professional networks, and we engaged all of that into the work. And I think also to add to that, to really look at when you're building partnerships, to really look at, is there a match? Can we do more together?

Olani Lilly: Can you share an example of maybe a partner that you've kind of like reached out to and are looking to collaborate with?

Andrea Dias-Machado: Sure, so for example, there is the Ho'ākalei Cultural Foundation. So, it's an organization that stores land that's owned by the Haseko Corporation, and it's in the, it's an area known as Honouliuli. So, they provide place-based Hawaiian culture-based education to students and the larger community. And so, we connected with them because we saw an opportunity where we could take the students from our new school to their place-based site so they can learn on the aina, on the land, and cultural practices such as limu gathering, siwi gathering that are specific to that place. One of the leaders of the organization, she's a graduate of Waiao and she's also a former Kumu and she actually took over the leadership reins. Her kupuna, her grandmother, was one of the Hawaiian elders that founded the organization. And so many of the mo'olelo, the stories and the traditions that she now shares, comes specifically from her grandmother teaching them to her. So we believe that this is very rare knowledge to have and to find. And we see the value in having our students learn in that kind of setting and then being able to amplify that and scale that kind of learning across our broader educational system.

Olani Lilly: That's what you get, right? Out of being, having a school in the community, you get that knowledge continued for generations because they've been in your school. So, when you see that alignment with those partnerships, what are your next steps?

Andrea Dias-Machado: So, I put myself out there and in talking to leaders of various community-based organizations, sharing what we're doing with the school. I think it's that,



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it's creating those spaces, but it's also just through observation and through being engaged in your own community and being a part of what's happening.

Olani Lilly: And earlier in that conversation, you had talked about different structures, right? You had talked about that physically, the school is going to be located at Kapolei Middle School, but maybe administratively, it's a satellite of another larger school. And so, are there any other, like, when you look at organizational structures, are you going to become a nonprofit? Are you going to be separate? I mean, what does that look like? And are you shopping around for an appropriate partner as far as it relates to like nonprofit and fiscal sponsorship? If you are, then what qualities are you looking for in those organizations?

Andrea Dias-Machado: That's a great question. So, we started with thinking about being a non-profit, but I feel strategically that it would be a more efficient and effective use of resources to partner with an existing non-profit and create a fiscal sponsorship relationship and or become a program of that nonprofit. You know, not just in terms of our mission and our vision, but really financially, we can extend our reach also fiscally if that we come together with an existing group. And, you know, also looking at the scarcity of resources, we do not want to add to hunger games that is in our community. And the characteristics that we are looking at are very similar. You know, do we see value in one another? And that there are certain things that we need, but there are certain things that we kind of, we are seasoned in. Kind of being able to leverage and maximize our skill sets in a way that makes sense.

Olani Lilly: Yeah. I think that's really smart that you're looking for a non-profit. And you know, you mentioned scarcity of resources. So, on the non-profit side, it seems like there may be two keys that you be needing assistance around, like funding and helping to organize. Is that correct?

Andrea Dias-Machado: Yes, that is definitely the, I'd say that's the next phase of the work. So, creating that, those infrastructures, those are the, yeah, the next phase of the journey.

Olani Lilly: Well, and that's really helpful. But I want to, this is going to be sort of a big sort of loop back to something that you had talked about regarding like the data that you collected from all of your focus groups and your surveys and all the ways in which you were collecting information. Was there any, I guess, feedback or data that you collected that really like surprised you?



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Andrea Dias-Machado: Yeah, so one data point that surprised me came from the haumana themselves, from the students themselves. And so, they talked about that when they continued on in a Hawaiian-focused school, that there was a perception that learning Hawaiian in an immersion setting was not a formal way of learning or lalo ha waihi. So, hearing that from them, knowing that our kaiopuni, our immersion students, are learning the way our kūpuna learned, and to have that kind of feeling was kind of shocking. And then it also, there was also hurt that I felt as a facilitator, to feel the hurt that they felt in having that perception about them. Someone shared that they wish they learned English earlier. So, in immersion, our students learn English in the fifth grade and that they felt that the fifth grade was too late. Not being able to read English proficiently made them feel not as smart as their English learning peers. That made me think immediately like what does that look like in curriculum? Like how do we take that feedback and not just hear it and be sad about it, but actually take action in terms of what can be done through instruction to make them feel confident? Well, aloha Hawaii, Hawaiian is their first language, but they also are out in the world where English is spoken out in all settings. So how do we make them feel confident? How do they feel confident about themselves and whatever setting they're in and not feel less than because they do not feel confident in reading English? So, what does that look like in instruction?

Olani Lilly: Is there a transition point? How are the families, and particularly your group, going to remain engaged? Are there any mechanisms built into sort of the creation of the school that you folks can continue to be engaged in the continued growth of the school?

Andrea Dias-Machado: So, to do that is to build a hui makua for Kapolei, so a parent network specifically for all of the new parents of the new students in the school. You know, some of them, I do know who they are, some of them I don't, so it's really going to be, you know, I imagine I'm going to be at that campus walking around, introducing myself to parents and, you know, building that network. We do have some connections into Anui Nui. It's been great to allow me to send out, you know, contact information form to start to build that connection, but it really will be for us to develop that hui makua and to kind of really have the conversations about what are our hopes and dreams for our keiki's education at Kapolei? What does that look like? How do we turn those into priorities for the group? And then how do we support the new Kumu at this brand new school and all of the unknown that's there. Like how do we create a support network for the Kumu and for all of us as we go on this uncharted territory together.

Olani Lilly: Yeah, I mean it sounds like you learned some like amazing lessons so far and I'm sure there's going to be bigger and exciting lessons learned. What do you think are



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some of the things that people misunderstand about the development of immersion programs?

Andrea Dias-Machado: You know, one was just not having a roadmap, right? Not knowing what to do, where to go. I think that was one. In Hawaiian immersion education for their keiki, a big question comes up is, is not viewing the language as a marketable skill. Like, you know, you hear people say like, what are you gonna do with that? Like, how is that gonna help you in life, right? And so being able to show the value that our kids have when they're in a global environment, that they have, they add a value that nobody else has, that they add a perspective that is completely unique to Hawai'i that you can't find anywhere else, and that there is brilliance in our culture. There is science, there's math, there's all the academic content built into our chants, our songs, our language, it's all there. And so, yeah, being able to, I think, demonstrate that, that, you know, having a Hawaiian language education, there is great worth in that. You know, our big alii trusts, you know, like Kamehameha Schools and other ones, you know, they're huge landowners, you know, billion-dollar institutions. These institutions are hiring, they're hiring staff that can speak Hawaiian. So, there's a lot of worth and marketability to having a Hawaiian language education that now we're seeing more and more. There's a lot more acknowledgement of that, but we always knew that; our kupuna always knew that, but I think the rest of the world is catching up to know that these are all real things and that, yeah, there's a lot of data now to show.

Olani Lilly: Awesome. You've provided us with a lot of information and a lot to think about. Was there anything else you wanted to add, any closing thoughts, to make sure that it was shared with those who would be listening to this podcast?

Andrea Dias-Machado: I just want to mahalo you, Olani, and the Office of Indian Education, just for the opportunity to share our journey. It's just been a wonderful experience and I just want to send out all my positive vibes to all the different Indigenous communities out there that are thinking, even have just a spark of an idea to create their own language school. And I just want to like support all of them and say, you know, listen to your inner voice, do it, make it happen. And yeah, I just support everyone on this journey and just continue to mahalo all the people who came before us and that we are one flame in this fire and that we hopefully can help the next group with what they wanna do in creating. So, just really continuing that momentum and it's just truly an honor to be a part of this work. So, mahalo.



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Olani Lilly: Mahalo, I just wanna thank you for your time. I think your work is so important because a lot of times we just sort of start off with planning. We don't even get into sort of who's going to be doing it, you know, where is this coming from, that really key foundational work. And so, I want to thank your community for their work and for them all pitching in. I know it takes a lot of time and commitment to be a parent, to be employed, to be a starter of an immersion school. And so, you have three full-time jobs right there in one person. So again, mahalo for everyone listening. Mahalo, Andrea, for sharing your experiences. And I hope that the learning that Andrea shared will help boost up other indigenous communities to give you some first steps in order to start your immersion school in your communities. Mahalo again for joining us. Aloha and Ahui Ho.